

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BERLIN 05909 270756Z

42

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AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

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AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

AMEMBASSY SOFIA

AMEMBASSY VIENNA

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

USMISSION USBERLIN UNN

USMISSION NATO

AMCONGEN GENEVA

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GENEVA FOR CSCE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, GE, UR

SUBJECT: BREZHNEV-HONECKER MEETING ON JUNE 17: WHAT WAS IT ABOUT?

REFTEL: BERLIN 5868

SUMMARY

SED FIRST SECRETARY HONECKER'S MEETING WITH BREZHNEV
ON JUNE 17 APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN LARGELY FOR THE PURPOSE
OF DISCUSSING BILATERAL ISSUES. CHIEF AMONG THESE WERE
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PAGE 02 BERLIN 05909 270756Z

PROBABLY USSR-GDR ECONOMIC RELATIONS, AND PREPARATIONS

IN BOTH COUNTRIES FOR PARTY CONGRESSES EARLY NEXT YEAR.
BEYOND SUCH MATTERS, EUROPE IN THE CONTEXT OF CSCE AND
FRG-GDR RELATIONS WERE PROBABLY ALSO CONSIDERED. END SUMMARY

1. WE HAVE BEEN TALKING WITH A NUMBER OF DIPLOMATS AND
EAST GERMAN OFFICIALS IN AN ATTEMPT TO PIECE TOGETHER THE
LIKELY REASONS FOR SED FIRST SECRETARY HONECKER'S SHORT,
UNEXPECTED, AND HIGHLY PUBLICIZED MEETING WITH BREZHNEV
IN MOSCOW ON JUNE 17, AND TO GLEAN SOME IDEA OF THE
SUBJECTS THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN DISCUSSED (REFTEL).

2. A CONSENSUS AMONG THOSE WITH WHOM WE HAVE SPOKEN IS
THAT THIS MEETING DEALT MAINLY WITH BILATERAL ISSUES AND
THAT AMONG THESE (AND THIS IS A VIEW STRONGLY HELD BY
GAUS AND OTHER FRG REPRESENTATIVES HERE) ECONOMIC
RELATIONS WERE OF FOREMOST CONCERN.

3. HONECKER VISITED MOSCOW LAST YEAR AT ABOUT THE
SAME TIME (JUNE 18TH). ON THE MATTER
OF TIMING, EAST GERMAN OFFICIALS (GEYER, SIEMENS, AND
KOSSIN OF MFA) HAVE BEEN AT PAINS TO EMPHASIZE TO US
THAT THE JUNE 17 DATE FOR HONECKER'S TRIP WAS DELIBERATELY
SELECTED TO PROVIDE A COUNTERWEIGHT TO THE MUCH
PUBLICIZED VISIT OF FRG PRESIDENT SCHEEL TO THE UNITED
STATES, AND TO THE TRADITIONAL CELEBRATION IN THE FRG
OF THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE JUNE 17, 1953 UPRISING IN EAST
BERLIN. ON THE OTHER HAND, SOVIET DIPLOMATS (MINISTER
GROMYKO AND COUNSELLOR SACHAROW) HAVE SAID QUITE THE
OPPOSITE, AND HAVE EXPRESSED ASTONISHMENT AT THE
SUGGESTION THAT BREZHNEV WOULD ARRANGE HIS SCHEDULE TO
RESPOND TO EVENTS IN THE WEST SUCH AS THESE. GROMYKO
TOLD US HONECKER'S VISIT HAD ORIGINALLY BEEN SET FOR
APRIL, AND RESCHEDULED A COUPLE OF TIMES SINCE THEN,
SUGGESTING THAT THE REASON WAS BREZHNEV'S "AILMENT."
HE DESCRIBED THE JUNE 17 DATE AS A "COINCIDENCE."
SACHAROW FLATLY DENIED THAT THERE WAS ANY CONNECTION
IN TERMS OF TIMING AND SEEMED TO BE AMUSED BY THE
IDEA. HE DESCRIBED THE VISIT AS A "NORMAL DEVELOPMENT"
WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF RELATIONS. (THERE MAY BE SOME
TRUTH TO BOTH VERSIONS. GEYER PUT IT THIS WAY: "IT
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PAGE 03 BERLIN 05909 270756Z

BECAME CLEAR THAT THE VISIT COULD FALL SEVERAL DAYS
ON ONE SIDE OR THE OTHER OF JUNE 17. WE ARGUED
STRONGLY THAT IT SHOULD TAKE PLACE ON JUNE 17.")

4. THE TOPICS DISCUSSED SEEM TO HAVE BEEN AT LEAST ALL
OF THOSE MENTIONED IN THE COMMUNIQUE. WE HAVE THE IM-
PRESSION THAT IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE THEY MAY HAVE
BEEN: (A) TRADE RELATIONS AND PROBLEMS OF PLANNING

BETWEEN THE SOVIET UNION AND GDR, AND ALSO FRG-GDR ECONOMIC RELATIONS; (B) PROSPECTS AND PREPARATIONS FOR THE SOVIET AND GDR PARTY CONFERENCES TO BE HELD IN FEBRUARY AND MAY OF NEXT YEAR; AND (C) THE EUROPEAN SCENE IN LIGHT OF CSCE AND FRG-GDR RELATIONS. THE DUTCH DCM TOLD US HE HAD HEARD FROM EAST GERMAN SOURCES THAT USSR-GDR TRADE RELATIONS HAD BEEN THE MAJOR ITEM, AND THAT HONECKER HAD EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER THE SOVIET OIL PRICE INCREASE.

5. GROMYKO TOLD US SOMEWHAT PONTIFICALLY THAT THE BASIC PURPOSE OF THE ENCOUNTER WAS TO "THANK HONECKER FOR THE FINE WAY IN WHICH THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF VE-DAY HAD BEEN COMMEMORATED IN THE GDR." HE SAID THERE HAD BEEN DISCUSSION IN MOSCOW AS TO HOW THIS EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE MIGHT BEST OCCUR, AND THAT A VISIT BY HONECKER, DUE ANYWAY, HAD BEEN DECIDED UPON. GROMYKO'S MENTION OF TOPICS DISCUSSED INCLUDED THA AABOVE, ALTHOUGH HE MADE A POINT OF SAYING ON JUNE 23 THAT THE SOVIET EMBASSY HAD NOT YET RECEIVED THE "ORIENTATION PAPER" THAT WOULD NORMALLY HAVE COME FROM MOSCOW FOLLOWING SUCH A MEETING. FOR THIS REASON, HE SAID, HE COULD NOT BE CERTAIN OF THE RANGE OF SUBJECTS DISCUSSED.

6. WE HAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT BERLIN, IN THE CONTEXT OF THE QA, WAS NOT ADDRESSED AT GREAT LENGTH NOR, IT SEEMS, WERE PREPARATIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN COMMUNIST PARTY CONFERENCE THAT IS SCHEDULED TO FOLLOW CSCE.

7. FRG REPRESENTATIVE GAUS TOLD US HE HAS THE IMPRESSION THAT THE EAST GERMANS PLAN TO COAST ALONG IN THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE FRG WITHOUT EITHER MUCH PROGRESS OR FRICTION UNTIL AFTER CSCE. GAUS SAID, BY WAY OF AN EXAMPLE, THAT ON JUNE 19 HE HAD MET WITH NIER OF THE CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 BERLIN 05909 270756Z

GDR FOREIGN MINISTRY TO DISCUSS CULTURAL MATTERS. IT WAS AN IDEAL OPPORTUNITY FOR THE EAST GERMANS TO TAKE A HARD LINE AND GAUS HAD EXPECTED THIS WOULD BE THE CASE. IT WAS NOT. AFTER THE MEETING, NIER TOOK GAUS ASIDE TO SUGGEST IN A FRIENDLY TONE THAT IT WOULD BE BEST TO WAIT "UNTIL AFTER OCTOBER" BEFORE SEEKING PROGRESS ON MATTERS SUCH AS THOSE UNDER DISCUSSION. THIS REMARK LEADS GAUS TO CONCLUDE THAT THE EAST GERMANS MAY HAVE DECIDED THEY HAVE GONE AS FAR FOR THE MOMENT AS THEY CAN IN INNER-GERMAN RELATIONS DURING THE PRE-CSCE PERIOD.

8. GROMYKO SAID OF INNER-GERMAN RELATIONS THAT HE THOUGHT THERE WAS NOW A CERTAIN HARDENING IN THE POSITIONS OF THE GDR AND FRG, PROBABLY BECAUSE BOTH SIDES HAVE

COME TO APPRECIATE WITH NEW CLARITY THE SHAPE OF THEIR PRESENT RELATIONS FOR THE TIME BEING, AND THE RELATIVELY LIMITED POSSIBILITIES FOR NEW DEPARTURES. HE DID NOT SAY THIS PEJORATIVELY, BUT SEEMED TO BE SUGGESTING THAT IT WAS A TIME FOR STOCK TAKING ON BOTH SIDES.

9. REGARDING BERLIN, GROMYKO SAID THE US WILL HAVE NOTICED THAT THE SOVIET UNION DECIDED SEVERAL MONTHS AGO TO MAKE "CERTAIN MOVES" WITH RESPECT TO "VIOLATIONS" OF THE QA, BUT NOW THAT THESE MOVES HAD BEEN MADE THERE WAS REASON TO EXPECT A PERIOD OF QUIET, ASSUMING NO FURTHER VIOLATIONS OCCUR.

10. THE SWEDISH AMBASSADOR MAY HAVE SUMMED IT ALL UP BY SAYING THAT HIS PROBES HAD LED HIM TO CONCLUDE THAT BREZHNEV AND HONECKER TALKED ABOUT BILATERAL ISSUES, AND DECIDED, ON BROADER QUESTIONS, THAT THE NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS WOULD BE A GOOD TIME TO "KEEP THING QUIET." COOPER

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